

Talent for transition

Higher professional education and practical
research for tomorrow's society

Strategic Agenda 2023 – 2028

ROTTERDAM UNIVERSITY
OF APPLIED SCIENCES



We are stepping forward

Our students play a key role. They make the difference in finding solutions to societal challenges. It is our job to prepare them. That is why we are stepping forward and taking on this responsibility.

To give substance to this, we have developed a strategic plan for the next five years. This plan sets out how we will organise our education, research, and organisation so that we can play an important role in solving major societal problems. We will do this by:

- Educating students to become professionals who are willing and able to manage transitions.
- Developing the practical knowledge and innovations needed to make transitions successful.
- Offering equal opportunities to both young people and adults to achieve a professional future that matches their talents and ambitions.
- Successfully educating students and training, retraining and upskilling working adults for shortage occupations.
- Enriching our educational offering
- Making our education more attractive and student-centred by seizing the opportunities offered by digitalisation.
- Preparing students for a future in which change is the only constant.
- Shaping tomorrow's society in collaboration with the professional field.

This requires us to have a clear view of our educational institution. We therefore took stock through an intensive process of assessments, analyses, explorations, scenario studies, interviews, focus groups, working sessions and open online consultations. The Strategic Agenda was developed based on these findings. By sharpening our mission and developing a clear vision, we set out how we will take responsibility in the years to come.

Our students deserve it. Our school deserves it. Society deserves it.

Executive Board

This document is a shortened version of the Strategic Agenda 2023-2028-Institutional plan. This publication is a translation of the Strategic Agenda 2023-2028. It cannot be relied upon for legal purposes in the event of @differences in interpretation. The Dutch text 'Strategische agendaHogeschool Rotterdam 2023 – 2028' is binding.

Chapter 1 sets out our mission, core values and vision. It is also about developments that have an impact on the training of professionals.	6
Chapter 2 shows how we are creating education that is more flexible and responsive to societal challenges.	9
Chapter 3 sets out how we view education and quality, focusing on student success.	12
Chapter 4 describes the four societal challenges that we are addressing through our teaching and research.	16
Chapter 5 looks at the increased supply of education needed to contribute to solving societal challenges and to train sufficient numbers of professionals for shortage occupations.	18
Chapter 6 presents our views on the opportunities that digitalisation offers for our education and our organisation.	22
Chapter 7 provides answers to the question of how we will achieve our mission, vision, and goals in the coming years.	23

Our social mission in a rapidly changing society

Talent for transition. A summary of what we will be working on together in the coming years. Talent stands for educating professionals, our social mission. Transition stands for the rapidly changing world, with major societal issues that require our teaching, research, and students to do something different from what we were used to.

There are three developments that have a major impact on our social mission.

1. Societal transitions

As a society, we need to find solutions to challenges that are becoming more urgent by the day:

- How do we (quickly) make our energy system sustainable (quickly)?
- How do we slow down and adapt to climate change?
- How do we improve healthcare and keep it affordable?
- How do we use digital technologies ethically?
- How can we make society more inclusive?

2. Labour market under pressure

To manage these transitions, many sectors are crying out for more qualified staff. This demand is growing, while the number of young people we can train in the coming years is not. Higher professional education is an essential link in providing solutions for the labour market shortage. During their studies, our students are already in the midst of practice, working with researchers, professors, and professionals on solutions to societal issues.

3. The position of higher education under pressure

The position of higher professional education is under pressure due to declining student numbers, on a national level as well. This is mainly due to increasing competition from universities. Due to the undervaluation of higher professional education in society, prospective students feel pressured to enrol at a university, and in addition, universities are increasingly responding to society's demand to offer an education that is more focused on professional practice. As a result, higher education (hbo) is in danger of losing its position as an independent route to and full preparation for a professional career. This is not only a bad development for higher education and our universities, but also for society.

Especially now, when society is struggling with major social challenges and the professions are facing a major shortage of highly qualified professionals, there is a great need for strong higher professional education. A higher professional education that fully trains young professionals and responds qualitatively and quantitatively to social tasks and labour market shortages. Higher professional education, which differs from universities in that it is based on practice and competence, is in close collaboration with the professional field and focuses on professional training.

Mission: what do we stand for?

We educate students to become highly qualified professionals for the jobs of today and tomorrow and develop practice-based knowledge and innovations that contribute to a sustainable society.

As an **educational institution**, we train sufficient students to become co-architects of a sustainable society. Step by step, we prepare them for their future responsibilities as professionals. We provide them with the tools to act effectively in an ever-changing environment.

As a **knowledge institution**, we develop practical knowledge and innovations that contribute to solving social issues. We anticipate, rather than follow, these developments.

As a **higher education community**, we set an example and model ourselves after society. We create an open, inclusive learning and working environment where talent is developed, and social issues are jointly addressed.

Core values

Our mission is underpinned by our core values, which guide our teaching, research, behaviour and policies.

Responsibility

We take responsibility. We educate students who will find their place in society and contribute to its progress. By helping to shape society, we contribute to major social change.

Resilience

We embrace challenges and use them as opportunities to grow through learning. This is how we train our students to become resilient professionals. It is how our organisation is agile. And how our practice-based research strengthens society.

Connectivity

We bring people together. To (learn to) work together. To (learn to) live together. To belong (and be allowed to belong) here where everyone feels welcome, safe, seen and valued.

Justness

We give students access to equal opportunities in society, based on talent and ambition. Our teaching and practical research contribute to reducing inequality of opportunity.

Vision: What are we aiming for?

In our vision, our education and research help to define four societal challenges:

Sustainable Delta

Take the energy transition seriously: replace fossil fuels with non-emitting and renewable energy sources. Contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Future-proof economy

Working with new, meaningful economic models and contributing to circular production, services, and consumption chains. Making urban and port logistics chains more sustainable.

A vibrant community

Reducing gaps in education, health, wealth, and well-being and increasing social participation. Making the transition from healthcare to healthy living and increasing citizens' self-sufficiency and resilience.

Smart & Social City

Responsible digitalisation and design of production processes, services, and infrastructure in and around the city.

With these goals we focus on 2028. Starting (no later than) that year:

- We train professionals for key roles in the field, giving them the skills and mindset to help shape the response to major societal issues. Together with our partners in the city, region, and port, we develop practical knowledge and innovations to bring about the necessary changes. We actively participate in regional, national, and international innovation labs and research programmes on these issues. In this way we make a demonstrable contribution to meeting these societal challenges for our students, our university of applied sciences, the city, and the country.
- We educate enough professionals for the labour market. In 2028, the number of students graduating on time in all our degree programmes will have increased compared to 2022. Working with employers, we offer full-time students training for shortage occupations the opportunity to complete part of their studies in the workplace. And we are upskilling or retraining working people through attractive part-time tracks for shortage occupations and transitional roles.
- As a higher education community, we are ourselves an example of a resilient, responsible, and just society in miniature. We are an inclusive organisation, welcoming new students, and staff with open arms. We promote equality by providing equal access to social opportunities in our education and as an employer. We instil in our students and staff the importance of core democratic values. We develop their resilience by giving them practice in public debate and democratic decision-making. And we strengthen and invigorate local democracy by providing a home for public dialogue and debate with our communities and by contributing our own expertise.

Renewing our education model

With a new education model, we will train more people for shortage occupations and jobs that play an important role in a rapidly changing world facing major societal issues. To do this, we must make education more flexible.

What will that be like for our students?

Students start their studies at their own study programme. Throughout their studies, we provide opportunities for them to:

- Develop knowledge and skills that transcend the subject areas of individual study programmes,
- Engage with and contribute to societal issues,
- Enter the workplace earlier, particularly in shortage occupations.

To achieve this, we are introducing two new components:

Ambition

By 2028, more than a third of our students who have the opportunity to do so will be involved in an interdisciplinary education focused on a societal issue, or in a work-study arrangement.

Issue-based education

It offers students from different programmes the opportunity to work together on social issues. They do so in learning communities and living labs where lecturers, researchers and practitioners work with and guide students. In this way, students learn to work with people from different disciplines and in different roles and to contribute to a sustainable society during their studies.

Work-study arrangements

Before the end of their studies, students will begin to work in these settings. They carry out tasks and responsibilities that enable them to achieve their learning objectives. They are guided by both their study programme and their employer. In this way, they gain practical experience earlier and use their talents more quickly to help the profession and society.

With our adapted education model, we are better preparing students for a field of work where major societal issues and transitional roles predominate. In addition, they can start working in shortage occupations while they are still studying.

**“I listen to
the city’s
questions.”**



"A teacher said to me that the city speaks – it tells you what to do.

I started to listen. Not to the noise of the traffic or the hammering of the building sites, but to the questions. What is really happening? What is right? What is not? What is annoying? What needs fixing? What could be smarter? What else is needed? And what does the city need in the future?

These questions have taught me to go out and find out what kind of research is actually needed. Not theories and models, but the other way round. The question is what inspires me. And the models and theories have helped me to find the solution.

Finding out what is needed and finding an answer together. By working together with students from other study programmes, I discovered that we could achieve much more that way."

Amir Singh

Student Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences 2025–2029

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using AI software MidJourney

Student Success: a student-centred learning environment

Students can develop their talents when the learning environment provides opportunities and guidance, is safe and familiar, and focuses on personal and professional development. We will therefore continue to shape our education with a focus on enhancing student success.

Our focus is on 7 points that are the key to student success.

1. Quality of education

We strengthen the quality of teaching by

- Aligning teaching objectives, assessment and learning activities to create curricula that are doable for students, teachable, and feasible.
- Providing students with more support in the learning process at the start of their studies. We help them with the knowledge and skills to organise, manage and control their own thinking, behaviour, and learning. We also help with planning, organisation, and effective study strategies.
- Maximising the active participation of students. We use proven teaching strategies such as formative practice, didactic coaching, retrieval practice and developmental assessment.

2. High expectations

Student success also requires a culture of high expectations. When lecturers demonstrate high expectations through their behaviour, students perform better. We achieve this by providing students with a challenging learning environment where we show them that we believe in them and that they can make a valuable contribution to major societal issues while they are still studying. By giving meaningful feedback and asking questions that challenge them. But also, by restricting ourselves to giving instructions. And by being friendly. By showing that we expect a lot from our students and their talents.

3. An inclusive university of applied sciences

We strive to make every student and staff member feel welcome, safe, seen and valued. We welcome everyone with open arms and work on the basis of inclusive didactics and pedagogy. A strong foundation of democratic values and ground rules plays an important role in this. It enables students, lecturers, and institutes to deal with different values, interests, and views. The development of democratic citizenship is therefore integrated into all our educational programmes as part of the development of professional identity. We also organise dialogues and debates to highlight democratic values and processes.

Ambition

All students feel welcome, safe, seen and valued. They develop as professionals and achieve appropriate qualifications.

4. Professional identity

To have a meaningful future as a professional, it is essential to get a good impression of the field, the professional role and the responsibilities involved. That is why we support students in their choice of study programmes with accessible and transparent information about professions and study programmes. We also help students in developing their own professional identity, based on our core values, and guided by social issues, as they progress through their studies. We help students make choices that are right for them. We also ensure that students who find out that a different course of study would suit them better are guided to a more appropriate next step.

5. Personal development

Personal development is at least as important for student success as professional development. Firstly, to give students equal opportunities in society. Therefore, in our training (as part of professional development) we also spend time on things such as building, learning to use, and expanding a professional network. Secondly, to give students the opportunity to develop in a broader sense. We do so by focussing on socialisation and personal development in all our curricula and offering a richer range of electives and additional curricular activities. Students are actively involved in developing and organising electives and activities that meet their own interests and development needs.

6. Curriculum structure

This requires an education in which students gradually develop into confident, independent, and reflective professionals in a way that suits them: intimate, personalised and challenging. And with staying power. That is why every student will start at a study programme that is structured, allows for difficult learning moments and room for mistakes. As they progress, we offer more choices. Where necessary, additional support is provided. In this way, we give everyone an equal chance to succeed. And, for those who are able and willing, space to accelerate and enrich their studies.

7. Students as a sounding board

To continually shape the conditions for student success, we involve students in education, educational development, educational innovation, educational implementation, and decision-making.

We will provide the best possible learning environment for all students to get the best out of themselves and their studies.

**“What I solve is
what I want to
become.”**



"During my studies and the places that I went to, I found out that the city and the world are very different from the environment I grew up in. As a result, I learned to look at things differently. At myself, at problems, at learning and working with others. That wasn't my goal when I started my studies, but it happened anyway. It got me more than I thought it would. It has also shaped me. Quite extraordinary.

I studied engineering because of the job guarantee. For the first two years, I felt like I was studying without a goal. Except of course that good job and earning money. Maybe become an engineer like my father.

Things changed for me during my internship at a company on RDM. I saw what problems I wanted to solve, not what I wanted to become. And with my solutions I want to point the city in the right direction. Those solutions will be my job. Whatever the job title may be."

Juliëtte Gerritsen

Student Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences 2025–2029

Portrait generated in part using AI
software MidJourney

Combining the power of education and research

We develop practice-based knowledge and innovations that help solve transition challenges that are most important for the future of our region: sustainable delta, future-proof economy, vibrant community, and smart & social city.

Our views on research

In 2028, our applied research projects will help shape the major transitions in our region. To this end, we are developing high-quality research and innovation programmes and participating in the most important national and regional research programmes and partnerships. We are recognised and valued as an educator and knowledge institution by the knowledge, education, and social partners and by the profession.

Our guiding principles:

- Our practice-based research makes a demonstrable contribution to the four major social issues.
- Collaboration between science, education, practice, and citizens is the basis of our approach at all stages of our practice-based research.
- We seek sustainable partnerships. We make commitments to our partners and ask the same of them.
- We embed our research in regional, national, and international research structures, funds, and grants programmes.
- We use the results of our research for further development.

Ambition

By 2025, Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences will have an agenda for impact-based teaching and research for all study programmes. By 2028, every student and lecturer will be exposed to practice-based research.

Research and education

The combination of research and teaching fosters a critical, inquisitive attitude among students and lecturers who approach issues from multiple perspectives. In addition, research continually updates the content of our curricula. The combination of research and teaching allows for a powerful, challenging, and inspiring learning and working environment for students, lecturers, researchers, and participants from professional practice.

To maintain focus and create mass for the four transition processes, we are drawing up an agenda for our institution's education and research. We are aiming for a ratio of 1 professor to 350 students. To this end, a stable infrastructure will be established, both by providing the necessary facilities for research, and by offering permanent positions for research (lecturers) and (future) professors.

We develop knowledge and innovations that help solve key transition issues through practice-based research.

Four challenges of transition

In our teaching and practice-based research, we create focus, scale and collaboration around the transition issues that matter most to the future of our region.

Sustainable Delta

The Rotterdam region is facing a major challenge to make its industry, port and urban environment more sustainable and climate friendly. More than any other region in the Netherlands, Rotterdam plays a crucial role in the transition to a sustainable energy economy. A large proportion of energy products enter our country via the port of Rotterdam. The Rijnmond region is the largest logistics industrial complex in the Netherlands. Climate change has a major impact on the delta city of Rotterdam. As a university of applied sciences (UAS), we are one of the main suppliers of people and knowledge to industry, construction, and services in the field of sustainability, climate resilience and energy transition. We will take on this important role even more strongly in the future. We are also committed to tackling energy poverty and inequality in the energy transition.

Future-proof economy

Our current economic system is reaching its social, environmental, and financial limits. We see a shift from an economy focused on profit and efficiency to one focused on meaningful activity and respect for the carrying capacity of people and planet. Through our education and research, we aim to contribute to this new world. For example, we will teach students to work with new economic value models. We embrace circularity and digitalisation in our organisation and seek to reduce waste in production, service, and consumption chains through our knowledge products. In this context, we are also committed to making logistics chains in cities and ports more sustainable and to an economy in which digitalisation plays a greater role.

A vibrant community

In a world where healthcare costs are skyrocketing and economic inequalities between people are increasing, it is vital that we, as the largest regional higher education institution, work to reduce inequalities in education, health, and welfare and to increase social participation. Many of our students will face these issues in their future careers, and our researchers are already working on them. As a UAS, we want to contribute to a more vital society, developing from 'health care' to 'health and well-being' and helping citizens to become more self-sufficient and resilient. We also feel (co-)responsible for reducing teacher shortages and educational inequalities. In this context, we are committed to a 'learning city', because transitions will only be realised if learning takes place everywhere. Talent development is our core mission.

Smart & Social City

In a fully digitalised world, it is essential that we are aware of the social and ethical consequences of this ubiquitous information technology. How do we want to use it and what is acceptable? Our students will learn to think about the responsible use of digital technology in the smart city. How do we responsibly digitise and design production processes, services, and infrastructure in and around the city? Based on a thoughtful use of digital technologies, we will also look at the other three transitions and what role digitalisation can play.

Expanding our programmes

We are training students for increasingly complex jobs, and even for new jobs that we do not yet know about. The demand for highly skilled professionals in shortage sectors such as healthcare, education, engineering, and IT will grow faster than the number of entrants to the labour market in the coming years. At the same time, many adults in other sectors will see their jobs change significantly or even disappear.

That is why we are adapting our programmes to meet the needs of the labour market. We are creating an educational offering that allows us to serve every student, from associate degree to professional doctorate, and every programme in between. We are innovating, expanding, and enriching our educational offering:

New associate degree and bachelor study programmes

Where professional practice requires new and distinctive basic knowledge and skills, we are developing new full-time bachelor's and associate degree programmes. In doing so, we consciously look for study programmes that transcend existing classifications and institutes.

Ambition

In 2026, we will offer a range of programmes that are qualitatively aligned with labour market needs in shortage sectors and transition challenges. In 2028, this offer will be positioned and organised in such a way that we can quantitatively scale with labour market demand.

Professional masters

There is a growing need among our students to add a master's qualification to their bachelor's degree. Moreover, the four societal challenges require a broad, in-depth, and specialised education in addition to our bachelor programmes. That is why, from 2028, we will offer a wide range of professional masters, preparing our students to become professionals who can play a key role in solving major societal challenges.

Our basic principles:

- All master programmes are professional master's; research and teaching for these students is based on the application of their knowledge and skills in practice.
- The four transition issues are leading the development of new master's programmes with a thematic, cross-disciplinary character.
- Specialist masters are closely linked to a specific profession and have a strictly defined civic impact.

Training programmes for (working) adults

In order to train more people for shortage occupations, we will strengthen and innovate our training provision for (working) adults. We will focus on professionals from other sectors who need a basic qualification to change careers, and professionals with a secondary vocational diploma who need an associate or bachelor's degree to progress. We will also use our knowledge and expertise to develop shorter training programmes around the four transition issues together with the professional field.

We can make lifelong learning a reality by:

- Working together on an attractive and effective education concept for (working) adults.
- Positioning our upskilling, retraining and refresher courses for (working) adults in a distinctive way.
- Having our centres of expertise collaborate with the professional field to develop refresher programmes to benefit the four transition assignments.
- Proactively supporting the scale-up of these programmes.

With our refreshed educational offering, we will keep in touch with the needs of the labour market and be able to offer every student a continuous learning path, from associate degree to professional doctorate. This applies to all students who want to play an important role in shortage professions and in solving societal challenges.

**“I’m working in
your inverted
world.”**



"I thought it was really cool that the teachers at RUAS were preparing me, without me being aware of it, to look at the world and my future in a different way. I worked on problems with students from other study programmes. Conducted research. Learned from others. Interdisciplinary education, I think they call it. Funny!

I didn't know it was called that, but I was able to walk my own path. I was challenged and others also helped me learn and discover. That combination worked for me: a place where it was safe to ask questions and be insecure, but where the bar was set high. It allowed me to really find out what I am and what I am not. And maybe I still want to specialise in something.

My dad said the other day: 'You're working in my inverted world. I followed my head. You follow your heart and now you can use what you have learned. You are working on solutions. If the city could speak, it would thank you.'

P.S. Dad, maybe you should go back to school. Get to know my inverted world. You are never too old for a lifetime of learning."

Jack Lu
Student Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences 2025–2029

Portrait generated in part using AI
software MidJourney

Views on digitalisation

Digitalisation is a driver of innovation. It is rapidly transforming society and professions. The scope and new opportunities require from us that we adapt the content, pedagogy and didactics of our education and the way we work.

Our core values and the societal challenges we face guide our ambitions for digitalisation. We are committed to the ethical and legal use of digital technology. The purpose of our education and research, and the interests of our students and lecturers are central to the development of new applications. We use digital tools as promising solutions to make our education better and more attractive, but never at the expense of equal opportunities, human contact, networking, and professional autonomy.

In the coming years, we will invest in digitalisation that will enhance and enrich our education, research, and organisation. As an organisation, we encourage and facilitate experimentation and innovation with new digital technologies. We are developing mechanisms to identify emerging technologies early and, where proven, to deploy them more widely. We also participate in national and sectoral initiatives and collaborate with other universities (of applied sciences). We use the national knowledge infrastructure on digitalisation to share knowledge, experience and insight and take a leading role in shaping the digitalisation of higher education.

Our students and staff learn and work in a digital landscape designed from the perspective of their 'journey'. This digital environment for learning and working is inclusive, accessible, intuitive, contextually rich, and meaningful. The digital and onsite learning and working environments are mutually reinforcing. In the future, all students and staff will be proficient and comfortable with digital technology. The development of digital skills is an ongoing and a natural part of working and learning. Our students and staff have the skills to manage the social and ethical aspects of digitalisation.

We create conditions in which students and staff feel comfortable using digital technologies responsibly in their studies and work. They also get support and help to make their studies and work easier, more fun and rewarding.

Ambition

By 2028, we have a proven track record of using digitalisation to improve the quality of our education, research, and organisation; to promote good and attractive employment practices; to strengthen our connection with society, and to increase our contribution to the challenges of transition.

Organisational development & implementation

The decision to focus on major societal challenges in addition to student success requires new ways of working and organising. The complexity of the tasks requires collaboration across disciplines, across existing organisational units and with different parties – both internally and externally.

With ever-changing forms of collaboration and solutions, learning and experimentation are as important as knowledge and experience. That's how we become a more agile and resilient UAS.

It is guided by the following points:

- Collaboration is key. We are exploring new ways of working (together).
 - Where necessary, we will adapt our organisational structure to meet the ambitions of this Strategic Agenda.
 - We focus on delivering our mission and ambitions.
 - Making our services more effective and focused on achieving this agenda.
 - To achieve the ambitions of this agenda, we will continue to rely on the professional responsibility of our study programme teams. Managers provide guidance on implementation, taking the professional responsibility of staff as the starting point.
 - Our organisational principle is that the intention leads, and the organisation follows. For new dossiers, we always start by asking ourselves the 'why'. Why do we want to achieve something? How does it relate to our mission, vision, and strategic goals?
 - We achieve our goals by learning together. This is what we call collaborative learning. We use the knowledge, expertise, and best practice out there to develop together.
 - We develop the leadership needed to put this organisational culture and the collaborative learning principles into practice. This leadership is: mission and vision driven, entrepreneurial, connecting, and inclusive.
 - We will create a stimulating working and learning environment that fosters professional development and increases our capacity to innovate and adapt.
- We organise our working methods to best enable people to work together in a flexible and multidisciplinary way with a focus on their assignment.
 - We provide integrated, mission-based services where we hold each other accountable for results.
 - We harmonise support processes where this improves the quality and effectiveness of services to students and staff or frees up resources to work on our vision.
 - We evaluate everything we do and closely monitor the progress we make towards achieving the goals set out in this agenda.

Implementation Plan

We will develop an implementation plan for the key issues in this agenda. This plan will focus on the following development assignments:

1. **Innovating our education model.**
2. **Student success.**
3. **Profiling and impact on societal challenges.**
4. **Developing our educational offer.**
5. **Digitalisation.**
6. **Service delivery & organisation.**

